

CITIZENS FOR A SAFE HIGHWAY 9 COMMITTEE NEWS RELEASE

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CDOT Says Yes to Grand County SH9 Safety Plan

“Lives will be saved. Thank you to everyone who made this happen.”

(KREMMLING, CO) –The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has selected State Highway 9 for RAMP funding to fast track safety improvements to the highway.

CDOT’s selection of SH9 for RAMP funding is the successful conclusion of an effort to raise more than \$9-million in matching funds in a few short weeks to qualify for RAMP consideration. That money came from contributions made by Grand and Summit counties, the towns of Kremmling and Silverthorne and businesses and private individuals who believed deeply in making SH9 safer.

Grand County Commissioners decided on April 9, 2013 to submit a RAMP Application for safety improvements on Highway 9. CDOT began accepting RAMP applications on May 1. RAMP, or Responsible Acceleration of Maintenance and Partnerships, was created by CDOT to fast track important road improvement projects in the state. To qualify for consideration under RAMP, local governments were required to raise 20% of the total cost of a project and submit an application that explained why the project should be put on a fast track for completion.

The total cost to make vital safety improvements to SH9 is estimated to be nearly \$46 million. That meant that Grand County had to raise \$9.2 million, or 20% of that \$46 million, to qualify for RAMP consideration.

The Citizens for a Safe Highway 9 Committee was formed to begin the effort to raise the money needed to qualify SH9 for RAMP. Led by longtime Grand County resident, Mike Ritschard, the Committee successfully raised in pledges the funding necessary to meet the July 1 deadline set by CDOT.

“The Citizens for a Safe Highway 9 Committee is grateful beyond words to everyone who pledged and provided the financial support to make the RAMP application possible,” said Mike Ritschard. “We are also grateful to CDOT for recognizing the critical need to make Highway 9 safer and selecting it for RAMP approval. Lives will be saved on Highway 9. Thank you to everyone who made this happen.”

SH 9 is a major route between Kremmling and Silverthorne in Summit and Grand counties. The narrow stretch of highway between mile markers 126 and 137, near the Green Mountain Dam Road and Colorado River Crossing, has long been the site of collisions between motorists and wildlife. SH9 is heavily used by school buses and by visitors traveling to recreation destinations in Summit, Grand, Routt and other counties in northwest Colorado. The two-lane highway is frequently congested with heavy traffic, which creates an even higher risk of collision between vehicles and wildlife, particularly at night.

The highway in this part of the Lower Blue River Valley runs through a winter migration path for wildlife, separating prime winter range on the east side of the highway from their only winter water source in the Blue River on the west side of the highway. This daily migration puts wildlife in the path of the cars and trucks on that stretch of road.

The project will improve this 10.6-mile stretch of the highway with overpasses and underpasses designed to allow deer and elk to travel safely from one side of the highway to the other. Fencing will prevent deer and elk from moving across the road and guide them to safe passage over and under the highway.

Summit County Commissioner Karn Stiegelmeier says she is pleased that her county's pledge to the Highway 9 RAMP effort will make the highway safer for all travelers.

"This is a vital link between Summit and Grand Counties," said Stiegelmeier. "It was so important to me and my fellow commissioners to be a part of the effort to make Highway 9 safer for our visitors, the residents of our county, our employees, indeed, for everyone who travels between our two counties."

Kremmling Town Manager Mark Campbell shares Commissioner Stiegelmeier's satisfaction with the investment the town made with its pledge to the Highway 9 RAMP campaign.

"The Kremmling town board feels strongly about its support for improving the safety along Highway 9," said Campbell. "The most dangerous stretch of that road is right outside our town limit. We all know first hand how important this is to the safety of our community."

Silverthorne Town Councilman Dave Anderson points to the support the fundraising effort received from diverse political jurisdictions in Summit and Grand Counties.

"The Silverthorne Town Council's support for the Highway 9 project demonstrates our shared commitment to build multi-jurisdictional alliances that enhance public safety and economic development," said Anderson.

Broad community support and an inventive, multipurpose engineering design were the qualities that allowed the SH 9 safety plan to win CDOT RAMP approval according to Kathy Connell who is a member of the Transportation Commission representing the Northwest Region of Colorado.

“You have to admire the innovative and creative design CDOT has engineered for the highway,” said Connell. “The design is impressive, but just as impressive is the grassroots support the project has received. This is a model for public-private partnerships.

In addition to the structures that will help keep wildlife off the highway, the project will also add eight-foot-wide paved shoulders to the highway that will accommodate bike paths.

Larry Lunceford of Summit County and a member of the Safe Highway 9 Committee expects work on the highway will be an economic boost to both Grand and Summit Counties during construction and may also bring long term tourism benefits.

“Not only will Highway 9 be safer, but the bike paths will be a great new recreational opportunity for visitors to Grand and Summit counties,” said Lunceford. “This is a great economic development opportunity for the Lower Blue River Valley.”

Longtime Kremmling businessman Tim Menhennett says it was gratifying to see how so many people responded to the opportunity presented by CDOT’s RAMP program.

“This is how to get things done,” said Menhennett. “State and local governments working together. Generous pledges from folks who live near and far. Everyone coming together to make something good happen. It’s a great lesson in the value of cooperation and real partnerships.”

The effort to make SH 9 safer dates back to March of 2011, when Blue Valley Ranch made a donation of \$805,000 to help Grand County and CDOT fund the planning and design engineering for safety and roadway improvements to the highway. That unprecedented public-private partnership between Grand County, CDOT and Blue Valley Ranch resulted in a shovel ready project that could be built as soon as funding could be found. It took two years, until the spring of 2013, but RAMP provided the funding answer.

In addition to the donation of \$850,000 that led to the creation of a shovel ready plan to enhance safety on SH 9, Blue Valley Ranch also offered right of way along SH 9 worth \$140,000. When the opportunity to apply for RAMP funding occurred, the ranch stepped forward again with a pledge of \$4-million if the remaining \$4.3-million could be raised to reach the \$9.2-million necessary to qualify for RAMP consideration.

Ultimately, the remaining \$4.3 million balance was raised from local governments and private sources in an impressive show of support from across Colorado and beyond. Pledges ranged from \$25 to \$100,000 demonstrating that even private citizens felt strongly enough about the project to give whatever they could. Grand County provided the final ingredient, pledging nearly \$3.1 million last June.

Grand County Commissioner Gary Bumgarner says every pledge is a great investment in the future.

“Highway 9 will be safer for generations to come,” said Bumgarner. “It feels so good to know that our family, friends and all the great people who visit our part of Colorado will travel here feeling safe and secure far into the future.”

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